**Interview with 2LT Bill Rogers III, Marine assigned to Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. Present at the Battle of Hué. Interviewed by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Navy Medical Department, 26 July 2005.**

**When did you join the Marines?**

I was in college--the University of Mississippi.

**Are you from Mississippi?**

I'm from Arkansas but Ole Miss is only 110 miles from my hometown. Anyway, I graduated from Ole Miss. In the summer of '66 I was figuring I'd be drafted. I played baseball at Ole Miss. I'd already gone 4 years and I needed one more year to graduate. The draft was in full force then and I wasn't going to be exempt that fifth year. So I had to do something. So I joined the Marine Corps to go OCS upon graduation. I graduated in the summer of '66 and entered the Marine Corps through OCS at Quantico in January of '67.

**When did you actually go to Vietnam?**

My basic class graduated the last of August and the whole class went straight to Vietnam the first week of October. We were all infantry.

**So you went to OCS first.**

Yes. I went to OCS in January and got commissioned on March 23rd. I then went through 22 weeks of the basic school that all Marine officers attend, including Naval Academy graduates.

**Were you assigned to a unit before you went to Vietnam or after you got there?**

My orders assigned me to the 1st Marine Division, Okinawa. That's as broad as it got. At Okinawa I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. I was assigned a platoon when I got to Vietnam.

**What platoon was that?**

I had 3rd Platoon from the first day--Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.

**How did you end up in Hué City?**

We had been down around An Hoa, which is south of Danang, during October, November, and December. In January we moved up north to the big Marine base camp at Phu Bai and ran patrols around there for several weeks.

The Tet Offensive started the 31st day of January 1968. They sent my company into Hué on that day.

**So the company was ordered in on the first day.**

Yes. We were the first company to get into Hué even though we weren't the first company to be dispatched. Alpha 1/1 was dispatched but never made it into Hué. It's a long approach into Hué on an elevated highway with rice paddies on both sides. Alpha 1/1 never made it in. They were held up and took a lot of casualties. We ended up going through Alpha 1/1 and into Hué about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Our destination was the Military Advisory Command headquarters [MACV].

**The MACV compound.**
Yes.

**What condition was it in when you got there?**
We had some problems that first night. The Army colonel said he'd never been so glad to see Marines in his whole life. They would have been overrun if we hadn't gotten there when we did.

The MACV compound was on the south side of the river right by the bridge. We had been there maybe an hour. We were then ordered to cross the bridge and go into the Citadel to locate an ARVN general. To this day, we've been very upset because we were ordered across that bridge.

Anyway, we went across the bridge, turned to the left, went a couple of hundred yards up the street to the Citadel before they opened up on us. We lost eight, nine, or ten Marines. If they had waited a little while longer until we got on down the street and into the Citadel, we would have lost everybody. We were lucky to get back across the bridge even though we had been in that heavy firefight and lost a lot of guys.

The whole company--all three platoons--pulled back across the bridge and spent the night in and around the MACV compound. Most of the company was down along the river. That first day was probably the longest day of my life. We thought we'd never see the sun again. And that was the 31st of January.

**There was a lot of activity between then and the time you were injured. What do you remember about the day you were wounded?**
We operated on the south side of the river the whole 10 days. My company did not go back across the bridge while I was there. We had maps of Hué. All the buildings had numbers on the back and you could identify them. We went from building to building and street to street. We'd enter the buildings and shoot the bad guys. I think there were 11,000 North Vietnamese in Hué City but we didn't know that. If I had known that, I probably wouldn't have gone. We did the same routine every day.

On the morning of the 9th of February about 8 o'clock in the morning the 2nd Platoon was pinned down at An Cuu Bridge. Their lieutenant was 2LT Steve Hancock, a good friend of mine to this day. He was pinned down so they sent my platoon down to get him.

Now there were only six of seven guys left with me on the 9th of February out of about 45. They had all either been killed or wounded in the first 8 or 9 days. So I had about 6 guys with me the morning I got shot.

We went down to An Cuu Bridge and put some pressure on the NVA to relieve Steve Hancock and his platoon and get them out of there. That's when I got shot. We were on one side of the street and the North Vietnamese were on the other and we just had a big firefight. And I got shot right on the ground floor of the building.

**Doc Higgins told me that you were either looking out the window or were standing near the window when you were hit. Is that how you remember it?**
I was standing sideways looking out the window across the street and I saw the guy who shot me. My M16 had jammed and I think I kinda stepped back to see what had happened. And that's when I got hit on the right side and the left thigh. Two bullets from an AK-47. And I don't mean just a little scratch. One bullet when right in my side right about my belt line and the

other bullet went through my thigh. If you just put your left hand on your [unintelligible] thigh, that's where the other bullet went through. It went completely through my leg. How it missed my femoral artery, I'll never know. That bullet could have killed me very quickly.

**You say you saw the guy who shot you?**

Oh, yes. The NVA were across the street about a hundred feet away. I learned that he was killed later.

I can still remember getting shot like it was yesterday. It knocked me down. It's not like in the movies where, like John Wayne, you keep standing up. It just knocked me against the wall and down on my back. I had two corpsmen with me at the time. John Higgins was the company corpsmen but he was with my platoon that morning because there were no other people for him to go with. Everybody had already been wounded and evacuated. I also had one of my platoon corpsmen, Terry Sutton. My other two platoon corpsmen had already been killed. To this day, I can't remember their names. Doc Higgins was right there and saved my life. Later he told me they didn't think I was gonna make it.

**What did they do for you?**

Everything from my chest to my knees was nothing but blood. My intestines had come out the hole in my side and were kind of laying there. I was just holding on to them. Doc was down on the floor working on my leg and said, "Doc, my thigh's okay. It's my stomach that's killin' me"

"No, Lieutenant. You've been shot in the thigh, too." I had so much pain in my stomach that I didn't realize I had also been shot in the thigh. So there I am with nothing but blood from my knees to my chest and my guts are just hanging out my side.

I said, "Doc, are my girlfriends gonna be disappointed?"

He said, "No, Lieutenant, you're okay. It missed that." The bullet came right across the top of my right thigh, grazed my right leg, dug into my left thigh, and came so close to my penis, I had a powder burn. That's how close it was.

They got me wrapped up, gave me two shots of morphine, then called a jeep in to get me. We were probably about half a mile or a mile from the MACV compound. So a small jeep came in and Higgins and Sutton put me on a stretcher. By then we were at the back of the building to get away from the firefight. They picked me up and had to put me over a barbed wire fence. I weighed 185 pounds but probably more with my flak jacket. As they were putting me over the fence, they dropped me. The stretcher turned sideways, I reached over and grabbed the top of the barbed wire to keep from falling off the stretcher and the barbed wire just tore my arm all up. I almost fell off the stretcher and I would have had I not reached up and grabbed the barbed wire on the top of the fence. They laughed; I laughed. Considered how bad I was shot up, my arm was the least of my worries.

Anyway, they got me in the back of the jeep and took me to the MACV compound. Years later, a sergeant came up to me and said, "LT Rogers. You don't remember me, do you?"

I said, "Well, it's good to see ya."

He said, "I was in the MACV compound when they brought you in and we thought you were carrying a newborn baby in your arms. But you weren't. You were holding your intestines."

Well, that was the situation I was in at that time.

**Did anyone provide you with any medical care at this point or were they waiting to evacuate you?**

There probably was some medical care but they didn't wait for that. The chaplain was there and a Marine colonel, COL Stanley Hughes, a regimental commander. In fact, I saw him 2 years later at a meeting and he remembered that whole thing.

They didn't do any more work on me but instead took me down the river.

**Did they try to put your intestines back in or apply a battle dressing?**

No. I don't how many feet of my intestines were hanging out, a bunch of them I'm sure. Later I lost 4 feet of my intestines. They later took out 2 feet of my illium and 2 feet of my jejunum, which are the only two medical terms I've known all my life. They also packed and wrapped my leg real good. There wasn't much they could do with my stomach; my intestines were all hanging out.

They took me down to the river where helicopters were coming in. I heard a chopper arriving. The radioman on the ground was talking to the chopper and the pilot was replying. The pilot, a Marine lieutenant said, "I've only got room for one more person." The guy on the ground was walking down the line and there were about 17 of us. He looked at me and said, "This guy goes first." I knew then I was in bad shape.

So I got on the chopper and the lieutenant pilot wanted to know who I was in case he'd gone to basic school with me. Then I told the gunner who I was.

They got me to Phu Bai where the doctors were waiting for me there at the little MASH unit, I guess you call it. They opened me from the gut up to . . . like open heart surgery and took the bullet out that was lodged in my stomach. Luckily, they were able to do a resection of my intestine right then so I did not have an ileostomy or colostomy. The bullet that went through my leg was a through-and-through.

Two days later, I went to the hospital in Danang, spent a night there, and then was flown right back to the States to Scott Air Force Base. I stayed there a couple of nights and then they flew me to the Naval Hospital in Memphis, which is only about 35 minutes from my home town.

I got into Millington on the 14 of February 1968, 5 or 6 days after I had been shot and spent February, March, and April there.

**How bad was your leg wound?**

You could almost stick your fist through it. The bullet came in the upper thigh to the inside and exited on the outside. I guess you could put a hot dog down it. They let it drain on both sides and changed the gauze regularly for a month or so. They didn't sew it up for a long time and let it drain.

**Did they give you the bullet after they removed it from your stomach?**

They gave me the bullet and I brought it home. That's a story in itself. In 1970 I was giving a slide presentation at the Rotary Club in my hometown, and had the bullet on display. The lights were dimmed so I could show the slides. And it disappeared and I never saw it again.

Anyway, after I got out of the hospital, I went out to Camp Pendleton about the 1st of May and spent the rest of '68, all of '69, and March of 1970 at the regimental headquarters at Camp Pendleton.

**What was your job there?**

I was on the 28th Marine regimental staff. I was S-4 logistics and was there the rest of my 2 years. I got out of the Marine Corps in March of 1970, came back home, and ended up working the family farm. It's in Earle, AR, a small town of about 3,000 people. I farm 2,000 acres on the farm that's been in the family for 65 years. My father bought it and he's still living. He's 86 years old. We're 30 miles from Memphis, TN. All the ground is irrigated; most of it is level grade. We grow a lot of rice.

**It's been 37 years since all that happened. Any ill effects from your wounds?**

I get 40 percent disability but I don't really have any trouble as far as my physical condition. I play tennis and I've snow skied over the years. For many years I had adhesions with my intestines and had terrible stomach aches but they never had to operate again. If I ate any more than I should, those stomach aches would just about kill me. But I got over that and I'm basically fine now, even though I have a big scar on my stomach. My leg is also fine. And I don't have any mental problems so I can't complain.

**And you stay in touch with Doc Higgins.**

We never had a reunion until 1987, almost 20 years after. Then in that year the battalion had a reunion in Washington, DC, and GEN Ernie Cheatham was our guest speaker. There were three companies there--Foxtrot, Hotel, and Golf. Echo Company was never called into Hué City. They were somewhere else guarding a bridge. To this day, GEN Cheatham is livid because he didn't have his fourth company. Anyway, that reunion kind of started everybody getting back together, seeing who all was alive, and things like that. Then the reunions started happening every few years.

In 1991 the Aegis cruiser, *Hué City* (CG-66) was commissioned on the 14th of September down in Pascagoula. It's the only ship named for a Vietnam battle. GEN Cheatham was the guest speaker and we had a huge crowd there. The colonel who brought down the Marine Corps band at that time was Peter Pace, the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He's a real good friend of mine. He was a lieutenant in the company but didn't come into Golf Company until after I got shot.

**I guess if it weren't for Doc Higgins and Doc Sutton, you wouldn't be here today.**

There's no doubt. There's not a day goes by that I don't think about those guys. If Higgins and Sutton had not been with me. If they had had to call in for a corpsman, I never would have made it. I couldn't have been in a better situation having two Navy corpsmen right there working on me almost before I hit the ground.

When I was in Washington, I looked up Terry Sutton's name on the Wall and made a tracing of it. I also found the name of my platoon sergeant, Bill Adams, on the Wall.

I'd like to tell you another story. When I grew up Earle, we had two gas stations, an ESSO station and a Gulf. I worked at that ESSO station from the time I was in the sixth grade until I graduated from college. As a result, I saw everyone in town who came by to get gas. At night the girls would come by the station. It was just kind of a gathering place.

In Vietnam at night I'd look at the stars and think about being back home and I'd think about that ESSO station. I'd ask God to let me get back home and be at the ESSO station where the girls were. "God, just let me get back to the ESSO station just one more time."

Well, we are coming into Hué the first day and got ambushed on the way in about half a mile from the MACV compound. We abandoned the 6 by trucks and walked into Hué to the

MACV compound. On the way in, it was just terrible, gunfire everywhere. I was just scared shitless. I said, "God, give me the courage to get through this thing and take care of the men." At the next intersection I looked over and on the corner of that intersection in Hué, was an ESSO station just like the one in my hometown. When I saw it, a cloud of fear was lifted off my shoulders and I knew then that I was gonna make it. And I did.

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